* launch of a Quality Upgradation Programme in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu for improving quality of tea manufactured by small growers.

* increase in basic customs duty on tea from 35% to 70% in the Budget of 2001-2002.

* ban on sale of tea in the Domestic Tariff Area by 100% Export Oriented Units (EOUs) and units in Export Processing Zones (EPZs).

* increase in the allowance under Section 33 AB of Income Tax Act from, 20% to 40% in the Budget 2001-02, designed to enhance productivity and quality through rejuvenation and replantation.

Selection of SC/ST/OBCs on merit

2295. MISS FRIDA TOPNO : Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that as provided under para 11 of Explanatory Notes to DOPT OM NO. 36012/2/96-Estt (Res.) dated 2nd July, 1997, persons belonging to SCs/STs and OBCs who are selected on merit are not required to be shown against the quota of vacancies/posts reserved for their communities; and

(b) if so, the total number of persons belonging to SC, ST and OBCs who have been selected/recruited/promoted on merit to different categories of services and not counted against the 'reserved quota of vacancies/posts' for their communities during the last three years under his Ministry?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI RAJIV PRATAP RUDI) : (a) Yes Sir.

(b) Information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Decline in tobacco export to Russia

2296. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH : Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state :

(a) whether the issue of export of tobacco to Russia which had fallen from 40,000 MT to 6,000 MT was taken up in the historic meeting on the 4th November, 2001 at Moscow;